



Emergency Management

UPDATE

September 2001



United front. VDEM On-Site Coordinator Cindi Causey briefs the unified command team. (Photo by Bob Lambert.)

Storm in "Tent City" tests plan

For the National Scout Jamboree, preparedness was more than a slogan.

When a major thunderstorm threatened the tent city housing 42,000 Scouts and leaders, the Jamboree unified command put their preparedness plan into action.

The storm built up quickly after three days of hot, muggy weather that sent hundreds of Scouts to medical tents for treatment of heat stress.

Cindi Causey, VDEM On-Site Coordinator, turned to the Jamboree Emergency Evacuation and Alerting Plan she prepared before this national event.

She relayed weather bulletins from the Virginia Air National Guard and National Weather Service to the command team, which was attending Maj. Gen. Colby Broadwater's daily briefing.

(continued on page 4)

State/local partners unified in command of Jamboree safety

By Bob Lambert, Staff Writer

When some 33,000 Boy Scouts start pounding tent stakes into the ground in your backyard, you'd better be prepared for any emergency.

On a hot, humid July week-end this summer, the National Scout Jamboree at Fort A.P. Hill boosted Caroline County's population from Virginia's 50th largest to 14th.

"The Boy Scouts created a temporary city in partnership with the military that included coordinated emergency medical services, public health and sanitation, and garbage pickup," says VDEM Deputy State Coordinator George Foresman.

Held every four years, the event brings people with divergent backgrounds together to function as a team.

Shared responsibility for day-to-day operations falls to the Jamboree director, the military task force commander and VDEM's on-site coordinator in consultation with VDEM executive management.

Under a unified command, each element has individual responsibilities and roles to play to make the system work.

"When a crisis occurs, all the players are positioned to effectively work with one another," Foresman says.



Tent City. The National Scout Jamboree offered unique emergency management challenges for the Fort A.P. Hill team. (Photo by Paul Demm, VDEM.)

"We put the team together from scratch without established working relationships or protocols and had the added challenge of incorporating an outside private organization that performed local governmental-type functions."

For limited, on-site emergencies, the Jamboree director and the military task force commander make the primary decisions. However, as in any other disaster or emergency, VDEM plays a major role beyond the camp perimeter.

"Once the Scouts are outside the gate, they're our responsibility," says VDEM Region II Coordinator Cindi Causey, who developed the 10-day event's emergency evacuation plan.

A major incident could have required an off-site evacuation of the entire Jamboree population to 55 emergency centers in six localities (Caroline, Hanover, Spotsylvania, Stafford and King George counties and the city of Fredericksburg) as well as Mary Washington College.

More than a drill or a tabletop exercise, the event offered the emergency management cadre a chance to put their emergency assets in place.

During the hectic week, the preparedness team set up tents for a mobile emergency medical unit and tested equipment, including a siren and loud-speaker system, which needed to be audible in each subcamp area. (continued on page 4)

Southwest Va. floods challenge EM resources

By Suzanne Simmons, PAO Reservist

High water poured out of mountain streams in Southwest Virginia twice in July. Events happened so fast, good emergency planning was the only thing that helped responders keep their heads above the torrent.

For planners and responders, it was a "head for the hills" downpour. Tazewell County bore the brunt of the first round of flooding July 8.

"We just about wore ourselves out trying to keep up with the sheer magnitude of it," says Sandy Etter, Tazewell's emergency management coordinator. "Then three weeks later to the day we had another flood."

This time the watery overburden drenched a much wider, nine-county area. "I've been here 50 years and never saw water come down like it did," recalls Robert Adkins, Wise County supervisor and emergency management coordinator.

Etter says their plan was critical to the county's response and recovery success.



A man with a plan. Tazewell EM Coordinator Sandy Etter relied on his plan to navigate the treacherous waters of back-to-back floods. (Photo by Suzanne Simmons.)

The plan outlines and designates available services while providing the flexibility to respond to a variety of situations.

"When people want to reinvent the wheel in the middle of an emergency, I refer them back to the plan," Etter says.

"I've realized how important it is to be a real coordinator and task out jobs instead of trying to do everything myself. That's what a plan lets me do."

For a month, Etter didn't set foot outside Tazewell County, but as soon as

he was able, he was applying his new-found expertise in flooded-out neighboring counties. "Finally, I had time to get out in the field," Etter recalls.

"It's a pretty humbling experience. You see the human side of it then, and you realize how blessed we are when you see people doing without."

Russell County's Judy Cooling stresses the value of lining up resources ahead of time. "Pre-planning and a proactive rather than reactive community were key in our response and recovery operation," says Cooling, emergency management and hazardous materials coordinator.

A plan, however, is just a piece of paper with writing on it if there's no one to back it up. In rural areas like Southwest Virginia, emergency responders rely heavily on the commitment of volunteers, and that means having them lined up, trained and available when disaster strikes.

"They are our emergency response," said Tazewell's Deputy Emergency Management Coordinator Sam Wolford. "Without them, we don't have a response."

July's flooding put the deployment of Southwest Virginia resources to the test. The experience gained from the first flood proved invaluable in the second.

Buchanan County Emergency Management Coordinator David Thompson said he and local responders worked hard to revamp his county's emergency plan after he came on as coordinator three years ago.

"I don't know how our EOP stacks up against others," Thompson says. "We took the basic state plan and made sure the stuff in it matched the services we have here so it would function well when we needed it. It worked really well."

Cooling wants to revisit the placement of emergency shelters in her county. One of the schools was in the floodplain and people couldn't get to the others.

"They were trapped on one side or the other with water between them and the school," Cooling says. "We're going to have to rethink our shelter locations."

Even at this point, not all lessons have been learned in the sobering light of day and better weather.

Says Cooling, "When we have more time to sit down and take a closer look at this event, I'm sure we'll learn even more."

Web-based info link now available to EMs



Public safety network. NBC12-TV Assistant VP for News Harvey Powers demonstrates capabilities of the Web link. (Photo by Bob Lambert.)

Although most residents get emergency information from their local TV station, the message probably lacks enough detail to cover their specific neighborhood.

NBC12-TV in Richmond is addressing the problem by offering its Severe Weather Alert System free of charge to 40 localities in its Central Virginia broadcast area.

Using a simple software program, local emergency managers can post detailed information to the www.nbc12.com Web site as well as their own. They also can post the message as an e-mail to local media.

In an emergency, viewers simply type in a particular location on the Web site. A screen will show any emergency information applying to their immediate area.

About two-dozen local emergency management representatives received program demonstration packets at an August VDEM briefing. Harvey Powers, NBC12-TV assistant vice president for news, and Ben Woods, meteorologist, explained how the system works.

The simplicity of getting localized information out to citizens on the Internet appealed to Don Kappel, Chesterfield County public affairs officer. "This is a great idea," Kappel says. "It's another arrow in our quiver [to notify the public.]"

The system can get precise information out quickly, noted Don J. Horton, deputy fire marshal and public information officer for the Richmond Fire Department. "It's a wonderful idea for the public at risk," he says.

If your locality is in the NBC12-TV viewing area and you'd like to participate, contact Harvey Powers at webmaster@nbc12.com or by phone at (804) 230-2781. You will receive a demonstration copy of the program to review.

One hazmat cleanup down, one more to go

By Suzanne Simmons
PAO Reservist

As soon as floodwaters swept hazardous materials into the creeks of Southwest Virginia, VDEM Hazmat Officer Jack Tolbert went looking for trouble.

Local knowledge, a team of well-trained hazmat officers and a determination to track down every potentially dangerous container underlie the rapid response.

In July, hazmat officers dealt with two floods in the same area but with very different signatures. The first flood, July 8-10, was concentrated in a relatively confined area in Tazewell County where Global Positioning System (GPS) equipment helped officers locate 347 containers and tanks.

Tolbert and two other state hazmat officers (HMOs) — Wade Collins of Danville and Ray Haring from Virginia Beach — staffed the Tazewell command center around the clock from July 8 until its doors closed on July 27.

For three grueling weeks, hazmat team members walked or floated in canoes along more than 70 miles of creeks and rivers. The three HMOs and 26 hazmat technicians and specialists from Wise and Giles counties, and the cities of Bristol, Danville and Salem, worked closely with local emergency management, fire department and emergency volunteers.

The mud had barely dried on their boots when a second, very different disaster, challenged their abilities. This one covered numerous watersheds in the sparsely populated Southwest Virginia counties of Buchanan, Dickenson, Lee, Russell, Scott, Smyth, Tazewell and Wise. Tolbert estimates it may take until late fall before all hazardous materials are located.

"It was impossible to walk or float all of the affected waterways like we did after the first storm," Tolbert says. "The water was too high and too swift. We've had to rely on residents to report problems."

Virginia's standardized hazmat training and equipment helped speed the recovery. "We can pull all the teams together and work well side-by-side," says Tolbert.

The ability to make field decisions streamlines the hazmat response, says VDEM Technological Hazards Division Director Brett Burdick. "Our officers have a tremendous amount of authority," Burdick says. "They're well-trained experts."

Familiarity with the area also is a major asset. Tolbert is from Wise County. Tazewell and the other seven declared counties are part of his territory.

"I know what's along the riverbanks," says Tolbert. "As soon as I knew we had problems in Tazewell on July 8, I went. We didn't wait until someone told me we had problems. We went out looking for them."



Hazmat roundup. The first cleanup effort (above) was completed fairly quickly. It may be late fall before all the hazardous materials released in the second flood event are located/contained. (Photo by Jack Tolbert.)



Hot tip. Henrico County Fire Battalion Chief Rocky Hudson outlines the thermal imaging camera's features to Pete McCabe, Columbia, Md., SAR incident commander at the Boy Scout Jamboree. (Photo and article by Bob Lambert.)

Henrico puts the heat on missing person searches

Search and Rescue teams spend long hours tracking individuals who seem to have vanished into thin air without a trace. A thermal imaging device so sophisticated that it can differentiate heat signatures can speed a rescue.

These units can detect a recent footprint along a path, a handprint on a wall or a body slumped on the floor of a burning building. Though they cost about as much as a mid-size automobile, communities like Henrico County believe they are well worth the expense.

"This is one of the hottest items in emergency services today," says Henrico County Fire Battalion Chief Rocky Hudson, who demonstrated the unit at the National Boy Scout Jamboree in July.

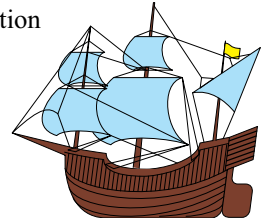
The equipment can be used in a wide variety of SAR scenarios — a missing Alzheimer's patient, somebody trapped in a burning building, an unconscious hypothermia victim — wherever a signature thermal image can help rescuers find an individual or avoid danger.

For further information about the use of thermal imaging technology, contact Battalion Chief Rocky Hudson at (804) 501-4900.

This month in Virginia storm history

On Sept. 6, 1667, a hurricane caused the Chesapeake Bay to rise a reported 12 feet and is likely to have widened the Lynnhaven River. According to one account, the storm knocked down 10,000 houses in the Jamestown area.

The storm washed away the foundation of Fort George at Old Point Comfort. Twelve days of rain was said to have followed this storm. Check our Web site at www.vdem.state.va.us/library/stats.cfm to learn more about the state's storm history.



Training Calendar

Emergency Management

Exercise Design

Sept. 12-13/Williamsburg

Developing Volunteer Resources

Sept. 19-20/Newport News

Mitigation for Emergency Mgrs.

Oct. 16-18/Williamsburg

Reservist Training

Action Tracking System

Sept. 13/Richmond

Search and Rescue

SAR Adjunct Instructor Meeting

Sept. 22/Richmond

Managing Search Operations

Oct. 19-21/Goochland

SAR Council/Mgmt. Conference

Oct. 27/Chesterfield

Technological Hazards

Public Safety Response to Terrorism (PSRT) — Tactical

Sept. 24-25/Virginia Beach

PSRT — Hazmat Team Ops.

Sept. 26/Virginia Beach

PSRT — Mgmt. Considerations

Oct. 2-3/Lynchburg

PSRT — Awareness

Oct. 4/Chantilly

Hazmat Technician

Sept. 10-21/Portsmouth

Oct. 15-26/Ashland

18th Annual Hazmat Conference

Sept. 27-29

DoubleTree Hotel, Va. Beach.

Register online at
www.convplus.com.

Jamboree (continued from page 1)

A fleet of 80 buses stood by to transfer Scouts from each camp area to the predetermined shelters. Three hundred more buses were ready from the supporting jurisdictions if the need arose.

Security on the base stayed at a high level with gates guarded against intruders. Preparations for President Bush's Sunday night appearance, later cancelled because of bad weather, incorporated extensive Secret Service operations to deal with an anticipated crowd of 100,000.

Now, when Virginia faces a major event, especially one that involves federal military resources and multiple federal agencies, it will be even better prepared.

"As a special event, the Boy Scout Jamboree offered a rare opportunity to operate a combination of local, state and federal agencies under a unified command structure," says Foresman.

"This event served as a good dry run to identify what we did well and what we need to improve. Our core VDEM and State Police resources have gained real-world experience to apply to the next situation."

Contact Cindi Causey at (540) 829-7371 or vdemcausey@msn.com for a copy of the "Emergency Evacuation and Alerting Plan for the Boy Scouts of America National Jamboree."

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Mark your calendar for 2001 winter campaign

As we enter peak hurricane season, it's hard to think about the cold days of winter. Yet, this is an excellent time to start planning your activities for Winter Preparedness Week, Nov. 11-17.

In partnership with the National Weather Service, VDEM will once again produce educational materials for you to customize for local use. Contact Rohn Brown at rbrown@vdem.state.va.us for all the details.



Tent City Storm (continued from page 1)

The storm warning advising all Scouts to take immediate shelter was broadcast over the public address system. Minutes later, lightning struck two Scouts.

Medics stationed at each of the campsites responded and the two Scouts were taken to Mary Washington Hospital where they were treated and later released.

"We got the warning out as quickly as possible, and when the lightning caught the two Scouts, they got immediate attention. Fortunately, their injuries were not serious," Causey says.

"The key to responding to an emergency at a major outdoor event like this Jamboree is having your response assets already in place."



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